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ABSTRACT

When children are raised in an environment where alcoholism is prominent, certain dysfunctional responses are learned as a way to cope with the challenge of that environment. This study was conducted to examine the learning styles of adult children of alcoholics. Subjects were college freshmen and self-identified adult children of alcoholics (total, N=294) who completed The Children of Alcoholic Screening Test (CAST), the MacAndrew subscale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, and the Grasha-Riechmann Learning Style Scales (GRLSS). Subjects also provided demographic information and completed the Mucowski Typology Scale, a series of 24 statements describing behaviors of the four types of survivor roles described by Black (1982): the responsible child, the placater, the avoidant child, and the acting out child. Data analysis was able to separate the avoidant and dependent learner types from among the other types of children from alcoholic families. The Mucowski Typology Scale was also able to sort correctly and correlate these two dysfunctional learning styles with two out of the four role types (placater and acting out child). This finding implies that if students with dysfunctional learning styles can be identified early enough within the school context, the ineffective learning styles and behavior patterns which they acquired in the course of their family experiences may be changed. (NB)

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A Paper Presented

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Adult Children of Alcoholic Parents: Their Roles and Learning Styles

It is estimated that there are between twenty-eight and thirty-four million children of alcoholics in the United States (Naiditch, 1983). An adult child of an alcoholic is any individual who when, during the formative years of their life (birth through young adulthood) was raised by one or two parents or parent surrogates who were alcoholic

Until about ten to twelve years ago, many of the problems associated with the disease of alcoholism and its effects on the family unit seemed to be little more than feelings of anxiety and depression which occupied family members. Something was wrong with the family member's sense of his/her own world, but s/he was unable to name that uneasiness directly. Nonetheless, the perception that a problem existed and needed identification continued to be experienced by the person.

Research into family structure and system has introduced the concept of parentification into family therapy literature. This notion, "the subjective distortion of a relationship as if one's partner or even children were his parent" was first introduced by Boszormenyi-Nagi and Spark (1973). Based upon this and later works (Goglia, 1985), it has been demonstrated that these individuals learn to assume distorted adult roles.

According to Black (1982), children of alcoholic homes are busy surviving... they assume the role(s) that make(s) the most sense to them--roles that will help bring peace to the chaotic, denying family in which they live. The important dynamic for them is to appear normal to the world outside their family (Woititz, 1983).

When a person is raised in an environment where the disease of alcoholism

is prominent in his or her family life, certain dysfunctional responses are learned as a way to cope with the challenges of the environment. These coping styles become internalized into role constellations which influence an individual's ability to survive within such stressful life experiences. Black (1982) is among those who have maintained that these patterns of interaction permeate all aspects of an individual's life. In fact, the roles and behaviors associated with them continue to be used even when they are not appropriate for the person to use them.

Black (1982) has suggested that four survival roles exist: Acting Out Child, Placater, Avoidant Child and The Responsible Child. In addition, she suggested that as children assume these roles an impact will be seen in a variety of behavioral manifestations. She is among a group of researchers who maintain that the roles serve a family function but limit the child's adult development. This, it is felt, has a profound effect on the long range outlook of the child, particularly as s/he experiences new challenges within his/her educational endeavors.

Since almost all children are raised within some kind of familial environment, either functional or dysfunctional, the child, in order to survive, learns to deal (in behavioral terms) with the challenges which that environment offers. If a child is raised in a dysfunctional environment, it begins to perceive that environment, as dysfunctional as it may be, to be the norm. Any other environment, such as a school environment, becomes for that child another challenge to be handled. Commenting on the versatility of individuals to make such adjustments, Lawrence (1979) noted "Peoples' habits tell a lot about them. Not just their 'bad habits', but also such habits as what they pay attention to, what they

care about, and how they decide things (p. 1)." which in school related functions means their learning styles.

Learning style is popularly defined as "a student's consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning" (Claxton and Ralston, 1978). Cornett (1983) has suggested that learning style may be a combination of nature and nurture. While it has been defined as a consistent pattern of behavior, it does change with age and experience (Brown and Hayden, 1985). It is developed over time as part of the life and educational experience which each person is exposed to in growing to adulthood. Whether the learning style is functional or dysfunctional ultimately relates to the person's ability to use it appropriately within the context of a particular environment where it aids the person in achieving certain ends. A predominant learning style then is a constellation of behaviors and patterns of behavior which are used by an individual to help him or her deal with the demands of their environment.

During the past several years the field of learning styles has seen a plethora of research studies and reviews in the area. Partridge (1983) citing the work of Claxton and Ralston in their 1978 review of literature set up the categorization of various models that were then extant. She separated learning styles into three distinct models: A) Cognitive Style Models; B) Student Response Style Models; and C) Integrated Models of Learning Style. The student response style model focuses specifically on how students behave and interact with one another in classroom settings. The Grasha-Riechmann Learning Style Inventory assesses the Student Response style model.

Eison (1984) reporting on research which examines learning styles, indicates that "Tony Grasha of the University of Cincinnati and Sheryl Riechmann

of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, have developed an instrument to assess six learning styles: Competitive, Collaborative, Avoidant, Participant, Dependent, and Independent. He notes further, "...Each style occurs to some degree in every student....however, students benefit most from teaching methods that closely fit their preferred styles. Students with 'impersonal' styles (independent, avoidant, competitive) identified the text, handouts, and lectures as most helpful, but those with strong 'personal' styles (collaborative, participant, dependent) found review sessions, study questions and learning from other students most beneficial" (p. 34).

Riechmann and Grasha (1974) reported about a study which was conducted to develop the Grasha-Riechmann Student Learning Styles Scales. The study was carried out after Grasha interviewed a sufficient number of students to establish three response styles. These response styles were later refined to include their dichotomous pole: Competitive-Collaborative; Dependent-Independent; Avoidant-Participant, The results of this study showed significant reliability coefficients for each of the six scales.

This model of learning style appears to relate to the role styles which were identified by Black (1982) and Wegscheider-Cruse(1979). If one looks at the descriptors derived from the behavioral manifestations of each set of roles, as hypothesized by Black (1982), one could postulate a connection between roles assumed by the adult child of an alcoholic family and the learning style which that person uses. The purpose of this research was to determine the potential relationship between any of the survivor roles as hypothesized by Black (1982) and the learning styles as described by Riechmann and Grasha (1974). A second purpose of the study was to determine if a scale developed by Mucowski (1987) would validate some or all of the roles postulated by Black (1982).

Method

Subjects

Subjects were drawn from two sources. The first source was incoming freshmen who were entering a four year liberal arts college. The second source was a group of self-identified ACOA's, some of whom were in counseling because of personal problems related to being an adult child from an alcoholic family. Members of each of these groups were asked to participate voluntarily in the study. Ultimately a total of two hundred ninety-four subjects volunteered and produced usable protocols. No attempt was made to delineate the sample based upon sex, marital status, ethnic origin, or other demographic categories. Age was the only limiting variable in that only those individuals seventeen or older were used in the study.

Procedures

The first phase of this study involved the development of an instrument to assess the typology of adult children of alcoholics as postulated by Black (1982). Items were generated in each of the four typologies: the responsible child; the placater; the avoidant child; the acting out child. Mucowski (1987) developed 24 items in total, six items per scale. The items were submitted to a group of seven experts who independently judged the scales. Using a procedure suggested by Scott (1955) and interrater reliability of .82 was derived and indicated a strong support for the scale items.

Once the instrument was validated, it was administered to the volunteers along with the Children of Alcoholic Screening Test (C.A.S.T.). (Jones, 1983); The MacAndrew subscale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, and the Grasha-Riechmann Learning Style Scales (GRSLSS). The Mucowski Typology

Scale consists of 24 statements that describe behaviors of one of the four types postulated by Black (1982). The C.A.S.T. is an inventory of 30 items that measure children's attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and experiences which might relate to a parent's drinking behavior. The MacAndrew Subscales has 49 items that separate the alcoholic from the nonalcoholic patients. The GRSLSS presents 90 statements, 15 of which assesses one of the six learning styles contained in the instrument. Demographic data on age, sex, and division of study (Arts, Science, Business) were also collected on the college students.

Analysis

Data obtained from the C.A.S.T., the MacAndrew Subscale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the Mucowski Typology Scale, the GRSLSS, and the demographic information were used in the analyses. Those data derived from the Demographics, the Mucowski Typology Scale and the GRSLSS were submitted to a stepwise discriminant analysis using the SPSS VAX MNMS Versions (Nie, 1983). Two analyses were performed one using the MacAndrew scores as the discriminant variables and the other using the C.A.S.T. scores.

The stepwise discriminant analysis was used because the experimenters were seeking to establish the best set of variables which could be derived from the predicting group. It was designed to determine which of the predictor variables discriminated among three classifications established by the C.A.S.T. and among three cut-off criteria established by the MacAndrew subscales. The C.A.S.T. categories were based upon score = 0 to 1, no alcohol involvement in the family; score = 2 to 5, some possible alcohol abuse in the family; and, score = 6+, definite alcohol abuse (probable alcoholism) in the family. The MacAndrew subscale categories were arbitrarily determined by the researchers to be based

upon a core = 0 to 15, no alcohol problem, score = 16 to 23 possible marginal alcohol problem, and score = 24+, eight percent prorbability of a potential alcohol problem (MacAndrew, 1965).

While the C.A.S.T. score classifications have been normalized, the MacAndrew scores for the first two categories were established by the researchers. This was done because the standardization was completed on known alcoholic parents versus nonalcoholic controls. Since the current sample was drawn from younger subjects, it was thought that the development of the two categories for scores between 0 and 23 would be appropriate. As far as the researchers were able to determine, no levels for identifying critical scores for classifying alcohol abusers was ever set for the college age population using the MacAndrew subscales.

In addition to the stepwise function, canonical discriminant functions were derived to judge the substantive utility of each disciminant function. On the basis of the eigenvalues and associated correlations, two functions were retained because they showed ability to separate the groups.

The canonical discriminant functions were evaluated at group centroids (mean discriminant score for each group on specific functions) to see how groups might be distinguishable from one another using the discriminant functions. Also, a classification of the results of both analyses showing the percentage of grouped cases predicted by level of alcohol involvement was developed.

Results

In the first analysis using the C.A.S.T., two learning styles (avoidant and dependent) and two typologies (the acting out child and the placater)

emerge as discriminators for the three groups. Table 1 summarizes the order in which variables entered the discriminant equation, F to enter, Wilks' Lambda and significance level.

In the second analysis using the MacAndrew, the same two learning styles emerged. However, only one typology (the responsible child) entered as a predictor. Two demographic variables (age and sex) also entered. Table 1 includes the same information as stated earlier for the order in which these variables entered the discriminant equation.

Insert Table 1 about here

The canonical discriminant functions for both of the analyses appear in Table 2 with their accompanying eigenvalues, percentage of variance and canonical correlation coefficients. As can be seen, in each of the analyses two functions emerged. In analysis one the first function accounsts for about 66% of the variance while in analysis two the first function accounts for about 80%. In each case, the first function seems to be substantially stronger than the second function in discriminating the groups.

Insert Table 2 about here

The standardized discriminant function coefficients for the functions are provided in Table 3. These coefficients represent the relative contribution of the variables to the respective functions. It should be noted that in analysis one, the learning styles make the stronger contribution to function 2, while

the typologies are stronger contributors to function one. However, in the second analysis, the demographic variables contribute to function 2, while the learning styles and the typology make the stronger contribution to function 1.

Insert Table 3 about here

The retained functions were evaluated at the group means and this information is presented in Table 4. It appears by the magnitude and direction of the centroids that function 1 in the C.A.S.T. analysis discriminates the first group frome the second and third groups, although group 1 does not show a strong position. In the MacAndrew analysis, the magnitude and direction of the centroids indicate that group 1 and 3 are quite different, while group 2 does not show a strong direction.

Insert Table 4 about here

A classification procedure was used to place cases into groups. Overall, the procedure correctly categorized 50% of cases when using the C.A.S.T. classifications and 38.49% when using the MacAndrew Scales. Table 5 summarizes the actual classification for subjects in each of the C.A.S.T. and MacAndrew categories.

When using the C.A.S.T. levels, two learning styles and two typologies significantly discriminated between the individuals who were surveyed. In the case of the MacAndrew Subscales levels, two demographic variables, two learning styles and one typology significantly discriminated between the individuals who participated in the study. The evaluation of the centroids (see Table 4)

for Function 1 indicated a differentiation between C.A.S.T. groups 2 and 3 and group 1 while Function 1 from the MacAndrew differentiates between group 1 and group 3 but does not seem to discriminate group 2 in any way.

Inspection of Table 5 shows that when using the C.A.S.T. scores the prediction level is at 50% for the total group but the best prediction is for group 1 (54%) and group 3 (46%). We see the same pattern when the MacAndrew scores are used; positive prediction of members of group 1 reaches 62% while positive prediction to group 3 is 59%. So while the C.A.S.T. is a better overall predictor, the MacAndrew does a better job of placing the individuals within the correct groups. It should be noted that neither instrument does as good a job of predicting group 2 placement.

Insert Table 5 about here

Discussion

A comparison of responses to the Mucowski Typology Scale and the GRSLSS by students that had been classified by two different instruments to detect the presence of alcohol problems within the individual's social structure, point to differences between two major groups who participated in the study.

Specifically, the researchers were able to separate the avoidant and dependent learner types from among the other types of children from alcoholic (COA's) of families. The Mucowski Typology Scale was also correctly able to sort and correlate these two dysfunctional learning styles with two out of the four role types which Black, 1982) postulated, that is, the placater and the acting out child. One may speculate that such roles and learning styles appear to compliment one another because of the similar dysfunctional

behavior patterns which these roles and learning styles support. For instance, the dependent learner/placater may choose a more personal learning style; however, s/he calls for much direction from teachers and peers. These individuals tend to take little responsibility for their own learning, but rather count on the authority figure or group to determine what is to be learned and how the learning will occur. The acting out/avoidant types, on the other hand, prefer the impersonal learning situation but do so in a dysfunctional way. They summarily refuse to engage in the educational process which is judged by them to be irrelevant or unnecessary. If they do not emotionally engage in the learning process, then they have nothing to lose if they do not succeed. They, too, take no responsibility for their own learning or dysfunctional behavior, but rather separate themselves from the others in their environment. Psychologists and social workers who have informally studied these phenomena maintain that such behavior occurs as a result of a sense of guilt and shame which was instilled in them through the process of parentification. Within such a process, the alcoholic parent creates an environment within the home that causes the acting out child to be bad so that s/he might appear good. The same alcoholic home environment is such that the dependent child can placate the alcoholic, thus avoiding the need to intervene and change the disease process within the family. Since it is not really possible to dichotomize the behavior which occurs at home from the individual COA in other contexts, it is quite likely that these behaviors carry over into the school context.

This finding implies, therefore, that if students with dysfunctional learning styles can be identified early enough within the school context,

perhaps the ineffective learning styles and behavior patterns which they acquired in their family can be challenged to change. Thus, intervention to change dysfunctional learning styles and behavior patterns within the context of the school environment, specifically at the level of classroom interaction, [since this has been shown to be a variable subject to growth and change (Hayden and Brown, 1985) over the college years] is a reasonable target for educators sensitive to such dynamics to offer students aid in making positive changes in this aspect of their lives.

Secondly, perhaps other variables might also be identified in the future which might offer better insight into the dynamics of the amorphous middle group on the C.A.S.T. inventory. The only thing that can be said about this group is that they are in transition. How long it will take them to move to the children of alcoholics group depends on the convergence of a number of other variables. It makes such prediction virtually impossible at this time.

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Table 1

Summary of Discriminate Analyses of GRSLSS and Black Typologies Dimensions by C.A.S.T. and MacAndrew Scores

C.A.S.T.

Step	Variable Entered	F to Enter	Wilks' Lambda	Significance Level
1	Acting Out	5.622	.95944	.0041
2	Dependent	4.827	.93100	.0008
3	Placater	4.029	.91434	.0006
4	Avoidant	3.294	.90684	.0011

MacAndrew

1	Age	3.086	.95499	.0175
2	Sex	3.778	.92936	.0011
3	Responsible Child	3.458	.90256	.0007
4	Avoidant	3.028	.89371	.0010
5	Dependent	2.864	.88024	.0008

Table 2

Canonical Discriminant Functions

C.A.S.T.

Functions	Eigenvalues	Percentage of Variance	Cumulative Percentage	Canonical Correlation
1	.0663	66.07	66.07	.25
2	.0341	33.93	100.00	.18

MacAndrew Scales

1	.1008	80.24	80.24	.30
2	.0248	19.76	100.00	.15

C.A.S.T.

After Function	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-Squared	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
0	.9068	25.86	8	.0011
1	.9670	8.86	3	.0311

MacAndrew Scales

0	.8862	31.87	10	.0004
1	.9757	6.48	4	.1658

Table 3

Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

Scales	Variables	Function 1	Function 2
C.A.S.T.	Avoidant	-.16	.48
	Dependent	-.39	.66
	Placater	.55	-.00
	Acting Out	.70	.41
MacAndrew	Sex	-.54	.66
	Age	.18	.74
	Avoidant	.49	.28
	Dependent	-.48	-.13
	Responsible	.42	.18

Table 4

Canonical Discriminant Function Evaluated at Group Means (Centroid)

Group	FUNCTIONS 1	2
C.A.S.T. 1	-.13	-.00
C.A.S.T. 2	.52	-.37
C.A.S.T. 3	.47	.43
MacAndrew 1	-.48	.28
MacAndrew 2	-.03	-.10
MacAndrew 3	.62	.17

Table 5

Classification of Results in Predicted Group Membership

Group	# Cases	Predicted Cases 1	2	3
C.A.S.T. 1	214	115 54%	37 17%	62 29%
C.A.S.T. 2	30	14 47%	9 30%	7 23%
C.A.S.T. 3	50	13 26%	14 28%	23 46%
MacAndrew 1	45	28 62%	7 16%	10 22%
MacAndrew 2	199	67 34%	56 28%	76 38%
MacAndrew 3	47	13 28%	6 13%	28 59%